



United States Institute of Peace

Russia's Assault on Ukraine and the International Order; Assessing and Bolstering the Western Response

Testimony before the U.S. Helsinki Commission

**William B. Taylor
Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine
Vice President, Russia and Europe
United States Institute of Peace
February 2, 2022**

Chairman Cardin, Co-Chairman Cohen, and members of the Helsinki Commission, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the current events in Ukraine and Russia. I am also honored to be here with Dr. Hill and General Hodges. General Hodges and I just returned yesterday from Kyiv and can report on the situation there.

I am Vice President, Russia and Europe at the United States Institute of Peace, although the views expressed here are my own. The U.S. Institute of Peace was established by Congress over 35 years ago as an independent, nonpartisan national institute to prevent and resolve violent conflicts abroad, in accordance with U.S. national interests and values.

The United States, the rest of NATO and Ukraine face a challenge from the Russian Federation that threatens stability and security in Europe and the world. If President Putin decides to invade Ukraine, it will drastically escalate a war that will result in the deaths of tens of thousands of military and civilian Ukrainians, and thousands of Russian soldiers. Attacking and killing civilians is a war crime.

As we speak here today, President Putin has a decision to make: invade or negotiate. As he decides, the United States, our allies and Ukraine are taking steps to influence that decision – building defense capabilities in NATO and in Ukraine, sending U.S. forces to Europe, preparing harsh sanctions that would cripple Russia’s economy, building international support for Ukraine against Russia. The purpose of these steps is to deter Mr. Putin from invading. There is some evidence that this deterrence is working.

Mr. Putin’s obsession with Ukraine is having the opposite effect to what he seeks. He wants to reincorporate Ukraine back into a Russian empire. His threat to invade Ukraine to achieve this goal has prompted Thomas Friedman to characterize Putin’s stance this way: “Marry me or I will kill you.” That captures it.

There is another way. The United States, NATO, Ukraine, and the rest of Europe are ready to sit at negotiating tables to discuss ways to improve the security of NATO, Russia, and Europe. Placement of nuclear missiles, size and location of military exercises, confidence building measures – these can all be discussed. Some of these issues have been the subject of ongoing negotiations between the United States and Russia since last summer.

What is not subject to negotiation is the sovereignty of any nation, including and especially Ukraine. The United States, its allies and Ukraine have been rock solid on this principle.

As I say, there have been some recent indications that Mr. Putin may be deciding to negotiate, not invade. He has not rejected the responses from the United States and NATO to his demands. His officials have indicated that they are still studying the responses and that further conversations can happen. The negotiations in the Normandy Format among Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France have restarted. The United States is working in parallel to those meetings.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, first Crimea and then Donbas, is the root cause of this crisis. Finding a solution could resolve it. That solution must include the departure of Russian troops

and proxy forces from Donbas – and eventually Crimea – and the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty over all its internationally recognized territory.

Mr. Chairman, we are here today because Ukraine is important to the security of the United States and the world. If Russia succeeds in subordinating Ukraine into a new sphere of influence – what some have characterized as a sphere of fear – the security of Europe will be severely threatened. The norms, principles, treaties, and commitments to the sovereignty of nations, to the peaceful resolution of disputes, to the inviolability of borders kept Europe free of major land wars in Europe for 69 years, from the end of World War II until Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014. Recommitment to those principles and norms of international behavior can reestablish that order.

Until Russia accepts Ukrainian sovereignty and withdraws from its territory, that can't happen.

Ukraine matters for another reason. Even though it is an old civilization and culture – centuries older than Russia -- it is a young nation of 45 million people, the vast majority of whom seek nothing more than the ability to live a normal life as a normal European country, able to choose its leaders, able to choose its trading partners, able to choose its security alliances, able to choose its political partners. They find themselves on the frontline of a war they didn't start. They are fighting Russia on our behalf. Like the American soldiers and military who fight on behalf of all American citizens, Ukraine is fighting Russia on behalf of Europe and the United States. It is the frontline of the battle between democracy and autocracy. We should support them.

With our support, they will prevail. Putin will lose.

I am glad to answer your questions.

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author and not the U.S. Institute of Peace.